

Trip Report: The Brecon Beacons

Date: 7th-9th September 2012

Group: Mike A (Leader), Lesley, Lynn, Tony, Mike H, Jim G, Colin, Richard, Della, Marie, Lynn, Amanda, Caryle

Route: See below

Total Distance: See below

Total Ascent: See below

Weather: See below

Friday 7th September

Location: Craig y Fan Ddu, Near Talybont Reservoir

Weather: Hot and sunny

Party: Mike A (Leader) & Lesley, Lynn, Mike H, Jim G

The Walk: Craig y Fan Ddu (683m) - Graig Fan Las (754m) - Cwar y Gigfran - Blaen y glyn

Distance: 5.7miles **Total Ascent:** 1780ft **Time:** 3hrs 30 min

The advanced party set off from Bunbury at 09.00 on Friday morning full of optimism. Surely all the weather forecasts could not be correct? A warm and sunny weekend in Wales. There must be an oxymoron there somewhere?

We were all new to the Brecon Beacons so researching a half day walk, the Trail Magazine again came up trumps with this "taster" route on the south facing slopes of the Beacons which was reached by driving past Talybont Reservoir to park on the edge of Blaen y glyn forest.

The girls were impressed immediately by the sight of a group of squaddies in the car park gathering themselves for a yomp on the moorlands. As the troops (BUMS) were thirsty following the 3 hour drive in the sunshine, a coffee break was taken there and then in the car park. The walk commenced following the Beacons Way, and we were heading uphill from the start, an attractive route alongside a stream complete with waterfalls. We soon reached the open slopes of Craig y Fan Ddu where we enjoyed a walk along the escarpment edge where lunch was taken with great views overlooking Cwm Caerfanell.

We left the Beacons Way and continued along Graig Fan Las rising to the highest point of the day by leaving our route to visit the western edge of the escarpment where we had our first proper look at the big beasts we were planning to conquer on Saturday. They looked very attractive against the blue skyline.

The next section was heading south east along the Cwar y Gigfran edge to first visit a memorial stone to a Wellington Bomber which came down on

the hill in 1942. We failed to pick up the lower path which led to the memorial but approached from above and had a good view down to the cairn. For some reason the rest of the group were reluctant to descend to the cairn only to have to climb back up again. A lack of respect I'd say, but there are alternative opinions. So we kept high and walked along the edge to a large cairn where we dropped off the end of the ridge and headed down towards the Caerfanell River.

At the river we stopped for yet another break (afternoon tea without the tea) before descending alongside the river back towards the forest where there were a number of waterfalls along the way, culminating in a high waterfall just before a bridge which entered the forest. This must be a famous waterfall judging by the number of photographers present, some complete with tripods. So it was then a steep uphill finish through the forest, alongside a further cluster (or whatever the collective noun is) of waterfalls

This was an excellent taster for the Brecon Beacons, as we were all pleasantly surprised by the varied landscape, not to mention the weather, as we didn't see a cloud in the sky all afternoon.

Looking forward to the big day on Pen y Fan and others on Saturday.

Saturday 8th September

Location: Brecon Beacons

Weather: Warm and sunny

Party: Mike A (Leader), Lesley, Lynn, Tony, Mike H, Jim G, Colin, Richard, Della, Marie

The Walk: Pen y Fan (886m) - Corn Du (873m) - Cribyn (795m) - Fan y Big (719m)

Distance: 11miles **Total Ascent:** 3552ft **Time:** 6hrs 30 min

Following yesterday's taster for the advanced party, the full BUMS squad was now available to tackle the "Big Beacons". Hugh, Caryle and Amanda decided to tackle the less hilly Brecon Canal while the rest of us headed off towards the car park in the foothills, but not before a considerable faff at the local garage buying up their stock of sandwiches and pork pies. Eventually we managed to arrive in convoy at the car park where the weather was surprisingly murky as we tooled up and set off.

As we started on the steady climb towards Pen Y Fan, the sky became clear and looking back, we could see why. Brecon and all the river valleys were covered in mist, and it made for a spectacular scene. Cue zillions of photos except for Lesley who had forgotten to charge up the Arrowsmith's camera battery.

We continued to climb steadily and after reaching the usual false summit we could see ahead all the mountains planned for in the itinerary. The only surprise was that the trail was surprisingly bereft of other walkers, however as we ascended the final steep approach to Pen y Fan, the summit plateau came into view, as did our view of hundreds of horaces, many with dogs and small children. Obviously the world and his wife had come up by an alternative route.

Our second objective was Corn Du, which was only a few hundred metres away and impossible to ignore from a peak bagging point of view. In no time we were there and back to Pen y Fan where we regrouped ready for the next phase which was the shapely summit of Cribyn at the head of the next valley. A coffee stop was by now overdue but we really needed to find somewhere less crowded so we located a sheltered spot in the sun as we descended off Pen y Fan.

Cribyn was reached after a stiff climb and following the customary photo shoot, our sights were then set on what was to some members of the party, by far the most exciting part of the day, namely the ascent of Fan y Big. There had already been a fair amount of talk during the weekend which could only be described as innuendo. The phrase "schoolboy humour" springs to mind. On the face of it, the BUMS are a relatively mature group, but the average mental age must be about 12 (especially the girls!). It was great fun though, and Fan y Big boasted the best feature of any of the summits we visited. A protruding sandstone slab known as the "diving board" on which almost every member of the party had their photo taken.

After so much excitement, the only thing to do was to have "lunch on Fan y Big" which we did on the ridge below the summit where we had great views looking over towards the route we had come. So, (nearly but not quite) drawing a line under the innuendo, we headed north on the Cefn Cyff ridge which would take us off the mountain. It was an ideal gentle descent, much appreciated by all the stiff joint sufferers, and would have been even more perfect if it had not been for a plague of flying ants which picked on a few members of the squad and caused Lesley to bring out the insect repellent.

We were now down off the mountain, skirting the fields and woodland which added to the variety of the walk and the excitement was not over totally because the Nant Cynwyn stream had to be forded, which proved too much for Marie who decided to remove her boots and paddle across. Just a couple of kms remained back to the car park with a short uphill finish which produced a few comments from the troops.

The weather was still warm and we were all in need of rehydration so it was off to The Boars Head in Brecon town centre where we were able to reflect on a great day out.

Sunday 9th September

Location: Black Mountains / Crickhowell

Weather: Warm and sunny

Party: Mike A (Leader), Lesley, Lynn, Tony, Jim G, Colin, Amanda, Caryle

The Walk: Table Mountain (451m)

Distance: 4.75miles **Total Ascent:** 3552ft **Time:** 2hrs 30 min

There were only 8 BUMS remaining after breakfast on Sunday and all were up for a gentle half day yomp so we found a route on the southern edge of the Black Mountains which was roughly on our way home. No prizes for working out how Table Mountain got its name, though it is more of a hill than a mountain. We could see its shape clearly from the car park at Crickhowell so it was easy to set off in the right direction. It was another warm day but there was a lot more high cloud around; our luck was still holding.

The well signposted route led up out of the town through fields until we were in open moorland below the summit, which we approached from the east. There was a short steep ascent up to the plateau which was smaller than I expected, I suppose about right for a tiny mountain. We milled around for a few minutes taking in the views of Pen Cerrig-calch to the north and the attractive Sugar Loaf which was to the south. The coffee break was postponed due to the insect swarms so we continued on our route off to the north and down to follow a wall where we found an excellent grassy area bathed in sunshine, perfect for a Sunday morning siesta.

The route continued west around the wall, before turning south back towards Crickhowell following the Cwm Cumbeth which we had to ford a couple of times. By this time we had picked up the Beacons Way, not for the first time during the weekend, so the volume of traffic increased but did not detract from an attractive walk back through fields, woodland and sunken paths alongside the stream, then back into the town.

From there we went our separate ways. Tony, Lynn, Colin and Amanda talked about heading for the Dysart. Some people cannot bear to break with tradition. Les Jim and myself headed for a tea shop before the journey home.

So a splendid weekend had come to an end. With great company, fantastic weather and better than expected terrain what could possibly have gone wrong! And I'm sure Tony, as shy and modest as he is, won't mind me mentioning that his specially selected Saturday night pub restaurant turned out to be a great success.

Mike A